

LEGAL NOTICE * LEGAL NOTICE
Managing Naturally Ignited Wildfire for Resource Benefits
Tahoe National Forest Plan Amendment
Public Scoping
USDA Forest Service
Tahoe National Forest
Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sierra, and Yuba Counties, California

The Forest Service is initiating scoping for a proposed amendment to the Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan 1990) that would expand opportunities for using naturally ignited (lightning-caused) wildfires on National Forest System lands to achieve multiple resource benefits, including enhancing forest resilience; reducing the risk for large, severe wildfires; stabilizing carbon storage; improving watershed health and function; and protecting public health and safety.

Need to Change the Forest Plan

Fire is an important tool for restoring forest health in the fire-adapted ecosystems. The Tahoe National Forest's meadows, shrublands, forestlands and riparian areas evolved with fire: they rely on fire to remain healthy and resilient. Historically, low- and mixed-severity wildfires occurred frequently across the Forest, and these fires provided important ecosystem benefits by reducing accumulated vegetation, recycling valuable nutrients into the soil, creating and maintaining wildlife habitat, and maintaining soil moisture for healthy forests and flowing streams. In the absence of frequent, low- to mixed-severity fire, forests across the Tahoe National Forest have become overly dense and highly susceptible to insect attacks, drought stress, and severe wildfire impacts. Under the existing Forest Plan, fire managers have very limited opportunities for managing naturally-ignited wildfires for resource benefits, which is why the Forest Service is proposing this amendment. Managing lightning-caused wildfire under appropriate conditions would enhance community and firefighter safety, protect watershed values and wildlife habitat, and restore forest resilience by reducing the build-up of dead and down fuels, which in turn would reduce the threat of high-severity wildfire.

Nature and Scope of Decision to be Made

Under the proposed amendment, the Forest Plan's existing management direction pertaining to wildfire management for Tahoe National Forest System lands would be replaced with: (1) desired conditions for wildfire; (2) a standard that fire management activities will minimize the risk of loss of life and damage to property or ecosystem function; firefighter and public safety will be the first priorities in every fire management activity; (3) a guideline that allows use of lightning-caused fire ignitions to meet multiple resource objectives when and where conditions permit and risk is within acceptable limits; and (4) direction for fire managers to use spatial support tools, such as wildfire risk assessments, fire management operating plans, and the current Forest Service decision support system, when determining the appropriate wildfire management strategy. The Tahoe National Forest Supervisor is the Responsible Official for making the decision regarding this proposed forest plan amendment.

Public Participation Opportunities

At this time, a decision has not been made regarding this proposal, and we are at the beginning stages of planning and environmental analysis. A Need to Change and Proposed Action document has been prepared (available online at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56983>), which provides detailed information about the assessment, need for change, proposal, and the proposed amendment's applicable substantive provisions under the Forest Service Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.8 through 219.11). Please let us know if you have issues (points of dispute, debate, or disagreement regarding our preliminary analysis and/or potential effects of the proposed amendment) or suggestions on how issues might be resolved. To assure your comments are fully considered during the scoping phase, please submit them within 30 days of the publication date of this legal notice. Additional comments are welcome throughout the planning process.

The public is encouraged to submit written comments electronically using the "Comment on Project" button available on the right-hand side of the screen on the proposal's webpage (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56983>). This is the official website that will be maintained throughout the planning process for the amendment. Comments may also be sent via e-mail to: tahoe_nf_comments@usda.gov with the e-mail's subject line, "Comments on Tahoe Wildfire Management Amendment." Printed copies of any documents are available upon request.

Written comments may be sent to: Laurie Perrot on behalf of the Tahoe National Forest Supervisor, 631 Coyote Street, Nevada City, CA 95959, or provide comments via facsimile to 530-478-6109. For those who wish to hand deliver their written comments, the Supervisor's Office hours are 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday (except Federal holidays). Acceptable formats for electronic comments are text or html e-mail, Adobe portable document format, and formats viewable in Microsoft Office applications (.doc or .docx).

Public meetings will be hosted to share information and answer questions about the preliminary need to change analysis and proposed amendment at the following dates, locations, and times:

- January 21, 2020 at the Truckee Ranger District Office (10811 Stockrest Springs Road, Truckee, CA 96161) from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- January 23, 2020 at the Supervisor's Office (631 Coyote Street, Nevada City, CA 95959) from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- January 28, 2020 at American River Ranger District Office (22830 Foresthill Road, Foresthill, CA 95631) from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- January 29, 2020 at the Yuba River Ranger District Office (15924 Highway 49, Camptonville, CA 95922) from 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- January 30, 2020 at the Sierraville Ranger District Office (317 South Lincoln St, Sierraville, CA 96126) from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The amendment will be developed pursuant to the requirements of the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) and the Forest Service Planning Rule (36 CFR 219). The Responsible Official intends to use an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze potential environmental impacts, and a formal public comment period will be provided for the preliminary EA. When a draft decision for the forest plan amendment becomes available, it will be subject to the objection regulations at 36 CFR 219, Subpart B. Individuals or entities who have submitted substantive formal comments related to the plan amendment during opportunities for public comment, including during this 30-day scoping period, will be eligible to file an objection on the forest plan amendment (36 CFR 218.5).

For additional information about the proposed amendment, please contact Shelly Allen, Forest Fire Management Officer, phone: (530) 478-6221, e-mail: rachelle.allen@usda.gov.